DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 096 CG 020 139

AUTHOR Towers, David A.; And Others
TITLE Metaphor as a Tool for Counselors.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development (New Orleans, LA, April 21-25, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Restructuring; College Students; *Counseling Techniques; *Definitions; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Interrater Reliability; *Metaphors

ABSTRACT

Metaphor has recently become a topic of considerable interest and empirical investigation. Cognitive theories view metaphor as an aid to cognitive restructuring. Beyond the heuristic and theoretical concepts, the results of empirical research have suggested that metaphor is a potentially valuable tool for enhancing client involvement in counseling and facilitating adaptive change. A study was conducted which attempted to refine operational definitions for use by raters viewing tapes of counseling interviews. A pretest-posttest group design was used in which training in the use of metaphors was the independent variable and the dependent variable was the number and duration of the metaphors and cliches established during the counseling session. Graduate students (N=11) served as interviewer-subjects; undergraduates (N=22) served as client-subjects. The results revealed that interrater reliability occurred as a result of the use of the definition developed for metaphor. Those interviewers who were trained in the use of metaphor began to use it following their training, whereas prior to training they had not used it at all. (Author/NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED285096

METAPHOR AS A TOOL FOR COUNSELORS

David A. Towers, Sandra J. Woolum, Edward Dow, Richard Senese,
Gretchen Ames, Jennifer Berg and Timothy McDonald

CG 020139

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

David Towers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development, New Orleans, LA, April 21-25, 1987.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Metaphor has recently become a topic of considerable interest and empirical investigation. This paper is a review of some the basic concepts relative to metaphor, the research applying metaphor as a counseling tool, and the results of an investigation of metaphor conducted by the authors. Viewed as a bridge between the verbal and imagistic processes, metaphor has been conceptualized as a tool for facilitating interaction between the cognitive and affective realms. Metaphor as a counseling tool is also briefly considered from the perspective of cognitive theories in which metaphor is viewed as an aid to cognitive restructuring. Beyond the heuristic and theoretical concepts, the results of empirical research have suggested that metaphor is a potentially valuable tool for enhancing client involvement in counseling and facilitating adaptive change. The study conducted by the paper's authors attempted to refine operational definitions for use by raters viewing tapes of counseling interviews. Interrater reliability was found to occur as a result of the use of the definition developed for metaphor. It was also found that interviewers trained in the use of metaphor began to use it in counseling sessions, whereas prior to training had not used it at all.

Metaphor as a Tool for Counselors

Imagine this scenario. An individual is seeing a counselor for a problem. Like many people, this individual has little understanding of the problem, and likewise has little idea how to communicate it. The counselor, though concerned and receptive, talks to this person in unfamiliar language -- psychological terminology. It takes several sessions before the client becomes familiar enough with the terminology to understand its meaning. It takes somewhat longer before the client begins to experience relief and learn methods of change.

In a counselor's office across town, another individual has come about a problem, but in this situation the counselor has communicated with the client differently. Realizing that the person might be unfamiliar with psychological terms, and that the client has come for relief from painful feelings, the counselor uses metaphor and terminology more familiar to the person that enable the client to benefit right away. As it happens the client is in business, and the counselor helps the client to see that life can be successfully managed like a business. This individual is helped to look at his life in a manner more relevant to the individual's life experience. The client already experiences some relief, and feels understood by the counselor as well. The client also has some direction for pursuing change and self-management.

The purpose of the present paper is to provide counselors with a research report on the therapeutic use of metaphor. Background and basic concepts relative to metaphor are presented first. This is followed by a review of the research on using metaphor as a counseling tool. Finally, the research problem, methodology and results are presented and discussed. It is intended that this review better enables counselors to integrate metaphor into their counseling practices as well as facilitate further research.

Background

Language has become an important area of study in recent years due to developments in the fields of linguistics, coummunications, brain research, artificial intelligence, and experimental psychology (Gardner, 1985). Likewise, its importance has been increasingly reflected in concern with the role of language in the therapeutic setting, and has been the subject of considerable speculation and empirical endeavor, particularly metaphoric language (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Barker, 1985; Erickson, 1980; Haley, 1976; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Suit & Paradise, 1985).

In attempting to identity the place of metaphoric language in daily life, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have found that metaphors are pervasive in everyday language, and they argue that our conceptual thought processes are largely metaphorical as well. They define metaphor in the following

way: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another " (1980). The psychotherapy literature gives a broad range of meaning to metaphor similar to the above definition, but also includes the variety of forms metaphor can take such as the parable, fable, fairy tale, anecdote, allegory, myth, cliche and narrative analogy.

In addition to identifying the many forms that metaphor apparently takes in human thought and interactions, attempts have been made to understand its role in psychological and communicative processes. Metzner (1986) and Barker (1985) have argued that metaphoric language may be thought of as the bridge integrating the two hemispheres of the brain as it combines the two basic types of thought processes, verbal and imagistic. Metaphor allows the verbal form of cognition to process the otherwise foreign conceptioning of imagistic thought, and vice versa. This process of bringing more of the client's cognitive capacities to bear in various types of mental processing not only allows for a synthesis of more of the various forms of cognition, but facilitates communication between individuals of differing cognitive styles.

A variety of perspectives have been offered in the literature describing the value and use of metaphor in the therapeutic setting. It has been suggested by Gordon (1978) that therapists, consciously as well as unconsciously, already

utilize metaphor with their clients. Haley (1976) states that the use of metaphor facilitates communicating new insights to clients without being directly explicit. Gore (1977) has proposed that metaphors both reveal and conceal underlying feelings and impulses. Gladding (1985) has proposed that the purpose of using metaphors therapeutically is to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. Expanding upon the possible therapeutic uses of metaphor, Barker (1985) recommends the use of metaphor for making and illustrating points, suggesting solutions to problems, helping people recognize themselves, providing seed ideas, embedding directives, and reframing problems.

Barker (1985) has also developed a classification for the types of therapeutic metaphor: (1) metaphors in the form of major stories used to provide perspective; (2) anecdotes and short stories aimed at limited goals; (3) analogies, similes and brief metaphorical statements that illustrate specific points; (4) relationship metaphors in which a relationship serves as a metaphor for the client's; (5) tasks with metaphorical meanings such as rituals; (6) metaphorical objects such as those used in play therapy; and (7) artistic metaphors such as using drawing or clay models. These types illustrate the variety of forms that metaphor has taken in clinical settings.

Although there are many examples and suggestions regarding the possible uses of metaphor in counseling, and heuristic clinical observations regarding them, and though the use of metaphor has been systematically observed to a limited extent in the counseling setting, only recently has research sought to examine the effects of metaphor in the therapeutic setting. A review of that research shall be presented after the following theoretical perspective.

A Theoretical Perspective

Viewing metaphor from a cognitively oriented perspective suggests possibilities of promoting adaptive behavioral change and growth through utilizing metaphor in the process of cognitive restructuring. Cognitive therapies have suggested that the reframing of internally generated self-talk and beliefs is critical to adaptive change. The client's world view is seen as determining how the client experiences life, and this world view can be expressed in the form of metaphor. In this context then, client use of irrational metaphors can be viewed by counselors as a signal to substitute more rational ones.

Control theory, a cognitive theory describing how mental processes direct behavior, suggests that mental representations determine behavior, as those representations form the standards by which we guide and adjust our behavior (Carver and Scheier, 1981). Guiding behavior with irrational

concepts leads to cognitive dissonance and maladjusted behavior, and distracts the client from noticing other critical aspects of experience. Cognitive therapies aid the client in re-evaluating and restructuring existing representations and focusing upon other relevent aspects of experience. The interpretive power of metaphor can aid this process of refocusing through providing analogies of experience familiar to the client. The resulting reframed conception then serves to generate more adaptive, effective, and satisfying behavior. The experience of congruence and observed effectiveness of the behavior maintains the adjustment.

Research Review

Although a considerable amount of literature exists providing heuristic descriptions of the therapeutic uses of metaphor, there are currently only several published empirical studies of metaphor use in the counseling setting. Following a review of these studies, an experimental study of the therapeutic uses of metaphor conducted by this paper's authors will be presented.

Gore (1977) investigated the effects of incidental use of metaphor on counselor-client interaction. He accomplished this by having graduate students rate tape recorded segments of counseling sessions. Results indicated that creative metaphors aroused client interest. A significant positive

relationship was also found between creative metaphors and a tendency toward nondefensive self-exploration. It was recommended that further study should be directed toward purposive use of metaphor and the specific effects of their use.

Payne (1983) examined the effectiveness of two types of metaphor upon self-concept and ideal self-image in disabled adults. In one group the metaphors were designed to disrupt old thinking patterns -- Esoteric Metaphor, while the second type of metaphor -- Self-defined Metaphor -- was designed to utilize habitual patterns of reality labelling. It was found that Esoteric Metaphor was more facilitative than Self-defined Metaphor in changing self-concept.

Angle (1984) researched the effects of client intuition and counselor metaphor use on client-percieved empathy and social influence factors. The results of the study indicated that both high and low intuitive clients recieving the metaphor conditions ranked the counselors higher in trustworthiness and attractiveness than did the clients in the control condition. This suggests that metaphor use enhances client-counselor interaction.

Suit and Paradise (1985) examined the effects of three different types of metaphor (cliches, complex metaphors and narrative analogies) on the perception of counselor attributes and intentions. The results indicated that narrative

analogies were more effective than cliches in producing positive client ratings of counselor empathy, regard and expertness in college students. Moderately complex metaphors were shown to be superior in producing these effects than were either highly complex metaphors or cliches. Further research examining which type of metaphors are more effective with what types of clients and problems was recommended.

The existing empirical literature suggests that metaphors enhance client involvement in the counseling process and facilitates adaptive change. It also provides indications that creative or original metaphors, and moderately complex metaphors are most effective in facilitating client involvement. It has been suggested that future research focus on further determining the specific effects of metaphor in the therapeutic setting. Further research is also needed to determine the types of metaphor that are most effective with which types of clients and what specific problems. The cognitive perspective suggests that this is the result of cognitive restructuring and involving more of the client's cognitive capacities in the process. More research and refinement of operational definitions are needed. Metaphor appears to hold great promise as an effective counseling tool. Greater involvement and commitment on the part of the client as well as the counselor could mean more effective counseling, and greater well-being.

The Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the following hypotheses: (1) that an interrater reliability could be established if an adequate operational definition of metaphor were developed, and raters were trained in observing it; (2) that counselors trained in the use of metaphor would increase their usage in the counseling setting; and (3) that the duration of original metaphors would exceed that of cliches in the counseling setting. The rationale for examining the foregoing hypotheses was that in accord with the existing empirical findings suggesting that the use of metaphor in the therapeutic setting appears to facilitate client-counselor interaction and adaptive behavior change, it was considered useful to: (1) define and further refine the operational definition of metaphor for systematic observation; (2) to determine whether training in the use of metaphor would alter the counselor's approach over time; and (3) to determine what types of metaphor were most likely to enhance counselor-client interactions.

Metaphor and cliche were defined in the following manner. Metaphor is an attempt to establish a common reference through a parallel example involving physical reality or a sensory modality. Further, it is the process of describing X in order to describe Y when X has a physical reality or creates a

sensory quality; when Y is an unknown (feeling, abstraction, experience); and when X has a different evolution from Y (parallel characteristics are not created by being from the same evolution). Therefore, metaphor occurs when a client or counselor is discussing X, and X has no reason to be discussed in this context, but X is parallel to Y. An example of a metaphor would be: The presence of the administrative council acted like a black curtain dropping over a play. A cliche was defined as having all the same properties as metaphor except that cliches are not original expressions and are commonly known.

The design of the study was a Pretest-Posttest group design. Training in the use of metaphors was the independent variable, while the dependent variables were the number and duration of the metaphors and cliches established during the counseling sessions.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-two volunteer undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology classes served as client-subjects in the study. These students recieved course credit for participation in the study. These student client-subjects were also interviewed by eleven interviewer-subjects, eight of whom were students in the graduate program in Educational Psychology. Two were graduate students in communicative

disorders, and the remaining interviewer- subject was an undergraduate chemical dependency counselor in training.

Apparatus

The apparatus consisted of videotape equipment used to produce the demonstration tape used in training the interviewer-subjects in the use of metaphor. The equipment was also used to record the counseling interviews between the undergraduate client-subjects and the interviewer-subjects.

Procedures

Interviewer-subjects were paired with client-subjects resulting in eleven pairs. Each of the eleven pairs produced a ten minute counseling pretest interview tape prior to the interviewer-subject's training in the use of metaphor. The post-training tape was produced by the interviewer-subject and and a different client-subject participant, such that there were twenty-two videotapes altogether that were submitted to trained raters for evaluation.

Two videotape raters were trained in the observation of metaphors to establish interrater reliability. The raters were trained with the aid of four demonstration counseling session videotapes. A single-blind technique was used to insure that raters had no knowledge of whether the videotape was a pre-treatment or post-treatment interview. The scoring of metaphors was systematized to establish operational criteria. The raters compiled the following information for

each of the twenty-two interviews: (1) a description of the metaphor used; (2) the beginning time and ending time of the metaphor in minutes and seconds; (3) whether the counselor or client initiated the metaphor; (4) whether or not the counselor or client responded to the metaphor employed; and (5) whether the figurative language employed was a metaphor or a cliche.

Results

Interrater reliability was based upon the rater's score sheets. It was found that the raters concurred that metaphors occurred in nineteen of the twenty-two interviews, or 86% of the time. A lower concurrence rate was found in distinguishing between metaphors and cliches. The interrater reliability in distinguishing between original metaphors and cliches was 10 out of twenty-two interviews, or a 45% agreement rate.

During the pre-treatment interviews it was found that neither the client-subjects nor the interviewer-subjects initiated the use of any metaphors or cliches. However, post-treatment interviews showed a dramatic increase in the use of both original metaphors and cliches. A total of eight original metaphors and two cliches were observed during the post-treatment interviews.

The total time spent on original metaphors during the post-treatment interviews was 534 seconds, or 9.9% of the

time, out of a possible total of 5,400 seconds. The duration of time spent on cliches during the post-treatment interviews amounted to a total of 212 seconds out of a possible total of 4,800 seconds, or 4.4% of the time. For all interviews, the mean time spent on each cliche was 26 seconds, while the mean time spent on original metaphors was 59 seconds.

A t-test for independent means was performed between the mean duration of the original metaphors and the cliches. The results fail to reject the null hypothesis, $t(15) = 1.331$, $p > .05$.

Discussion

The first hypothesis regarding the ability to establish interrater reliability was supported. The data demonstrated that rater recognition of verbal figurative language such as metaphor and cliche achieved high reliability. However, interrater reliability concerning whether or not raters could distinguish between cliches and metaphors was more difficult to establish.

The difficulties in distinguishing between metaphors and cliches may have been due to the discrepency in definitions given to the raters, who were given more specific operational definitions, than those given to the interviewer-subjects. In addition, the lack of a clear operational definition of cliches may have contributed to the rater's inability to reliably distinguish between original metaphors and cliches.

It is recommended that future research should include rater rehearsal into the research design as rater rehearsal increased the level of agreement between the raters. Also, future research should rate time intervals at approximately 15 seconds so as to allow for more complex analysis of interrater reliability.

The second hypothesis that training in metaphor use would lead to greater usage of metaphors in the counseling setting was also supported as is clearly indicated by the fact that during pre-treatment interviews no metaphors were utilized and that by post-treatment interviews significantly more metaphors were being utilized. It can be speculated that more training in the use of metaphors would lead to greater metaphor usage by clients as well. Also, the training of counselors in metaphor use could be more focused upon intervention in specific counseling processes. The training of counselors in the use of in vivo metaphor usage needs to be more fully developed.

Future research in the training of counselors in the use of metaphor should explore the theoretical concepts and programmatic aspects associated with the developmental nature of the effective use of metaphors. It is suspected that not only does the counselor improve in the use of metaphor through a series of stages in effective usage, but the cognitive developmental stages of the clients must also be a factor in

terms of considering what metaphors are appropriate and how to present them.

The third hypothesis was not supported. No significant difference was found between the duration of original metaphors and cliches. The hypothesis was based on earlier research (Suit and Paradise, 1985) suggesting that moderately complex metaphors were better recieved by clients than other forms of metaphor. It was therefore expected that metaphors would result in more client-interviewer interaction time than cliches. This lack of significant difference may be the result of the brief duration of the interview sessions. The short duration of the sessions in all likelihood tended to prevent the necessary depth in interaction from taking place. It is recommended that future research clarify this question of whether depth and duration of interview effect duration of metaphor usage.

The design of this pilot study was subject to limitations. The use of the pre-test/post-test design did not adequately control for a variety of extraneous variables. Future research should incorporate designs that include more stringent controls, such as the pre-test/post-test control group experimental design.

Currently, the authors are investigating two issues raised by the implications of the study. The design of the new research modifies the earlier design to include a control

group and randomly assigned subjects. The new research modifies the length and, therefore, the possible depth of client-counselor interaction. Client-subjects will be instructed to discuss topics which they believe cannot be understood easily by another person. And lastly, the interviewer-subjects will recieve more comprehensive training in metaphor usage. The research will be conducted by the authors during November of 1986, at the University of Minnesota/Duluth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angle, D. R. (1984). The Effects of Client Intuition Level and Counselor Metaphor Use on Client-Perceived Empathy and Social Influence Factors in a Counseling Analogue. Dissertation Abstracts International, 45, 1036-A.

Bandler, R. & Grinder, J. (1979). Frogs Into Princes. Moab, Utah: Real People Press.

Barker, P. (1985). Using Metaphors in Psychotherapy. New York: Bruner/Mazel.

Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1981). Attention and Self-Regulation: A Control Theory Approach to Human Behavior. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Erickson, M. H. (1980). The Nature of Hypnosis and Suggestion. (Collected Papers, Vol. I, E. L. Rossi, Ed.). New York: Irvington.

Gardner, H. (1985). The Mind's New Science: The Cognitive Revolution. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Gladding, S. T. (1985). "Counseling and the Creative Arts." Counseling and Human Development, 18 (1), 1-12.

Gordon, D. (1978). Therapeutic Metaphors. Cupertino, Cal.: Meta Publications.

Gore, J. S. (1977). Psychological Functions of Metaphors. Dissertation Abstracts International, 38, 2861-B.

Haley, J. (1976). Problem-solving Therapy. New York: Harper and Row.

LaKoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980) Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Metzner, R. (1986) Opening to Inner Light. New York: Tarcher.

Minuchin, S. & Fishman, H. (1981). Family Therapy Techniques. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Payne, W. R. (1983) The Impact of Metaphorical Language Upon Self-Concept and Ideal Self During Group Counseling With Disabled Adults: An Experiment. Dissertation Abstracts International, 44, 2046-A.

Suit, J.L. and Paradise, L.V. (1985). "Effects of Metaphors and Cognitive Complexity on Perceived Counselor Characteristics." Journal of Counseling Psychology, 32 (1), 23-28.